

*Echium vulgare*

**VIPER’S-BUGLOSS** is an invasive annual to perennial. Native to Asia and Europe, it has reddish-pink turning through blue to violet-purple flowers.

It is also known as Adderwort, *Blåeld* (Swedish), *Blauer Heinrich* (German), *Blou Echium* (Afrikaans), Bluebottle, Blue cat’s tail, Blue devil, Blue dusil, Blue echium, Blue stem, Blue thistle, Blue weed, Blue weed of Europe, Blue wort, Bugles, *Buglose* (Spanish), Bugloss, *Buglosse* (French), Cat’s tail, Common echium, Common viper’s-bugloss, *Ekio ordinara* (Esperanto), *Erba delle vipere* (Italian), *Gemeiner Natterkopf* (German), *Gewöhnlicher Natterkopf* (German), *Hadinec obecný* (Czech), *Hadinec obyčajný* (Slovak), *Hierba de la vibora* (Spanish), Ironweed, *Natterkopf* (German), *Neidonkieli* (Finnish), Our Lord’s flannel, Our Saviour’s flannel, Patterson’s curse, *Rumian* (Russian), Salvation Jane, *Slangehoved* (Danish), *Slangenkruid* (Dutch), Snake flower, Soldiers and sailors, *Tafod y Bwch* (Welsh), Today and tomorrow, *Vipérin* (French), Viper’s grass, Viper’s herb, and Wild borage; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of falsehood.

Viper’s-bugloss is attractive to many insects including bees and butterflies.

Warning – the whole of viper’s-bugloss is potentially poisonous and must not be taken internally. Its hairs can cause dermatitis.

Viper’s-bugloss is related to borage (*Borago officinalis*) which is a member of a different genus of the same family.

*Vulgare* means ‘common’.

Bugloss in the English common name is derived from Greek *bou* (cow, ox) and Latin *glossa* (tongue) components with reference to the shape of the leaf.

Christian legend tells how the leaves were said to have provided flannel for the Christ child’s clothes.

It is said that in some areas of the Austrian Tyrol people are warned against eating the plant as it is believed to stimulate sexual desire.

The plant came to be known to some of the North American Indian tribes and records note that the Cherokee Indians used the seeds as beads. In contrast the Menominee tribe took a bitter-tasting tea made from the roots as both a love charm and a painkiller.

The North American Indian tribes also recognized viper’s-bugloss as a source of medicine. The Iroquois tribe used it for some female problems, Cherokees prescribed it for urinary disorders and the Mohican Indians turned to it for kidney ailments.

In some parts of North America, especially in some of the southern States of the United States, many farmers view the introduction today of viper’s-bugloss to that Continent decades ago as disastrous event. Environmentally in these areas of the South it is so invasive that it has even been known to overrun cultivated fields.

Authorities note that at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries the juice from the flowering tops provides a commercial ingredient used by the cosmetics industry.

Medicinally, it has little significance today although it was recommended by European herbalists in the past for the treatment of fever, headaches, nervous disorders, backache, kidney disorders and snake bites. (This last is one of the many remedies, some more doubtful than others, which were identified under the 16<sup>th</sup> Century cult of the Doctrine of

Signatures. In this instance the marking on the speckled stem was thought to resemble a viper's head.)